

Game Shows Touch Our Lives by emmablownguns

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Summary:

People say friends don't destroy one another, what do they know about friends?

Game Shows Touch Our Lives

Author's Note:

this is super short and shitty and basically only written bc ive been listening to the mountain goats album "tallahassee" all weekend. the alpha couple relationship reminds me of ted and karen wheeler so much... so i just decided to shit something out real fast. i wrote this in a couple of hours and im not even gonna edit it bc whatever
adios

Karen Wheeler didn't want to get out of bed today.

If she could choose, she wouldn't startle awake to the sound of her husband's alarm clock. She wouldn't be the one to turn it off and rouse the sleeping giant, her prodding fingers as useless as the alarm itself.

On any other day, she wouldn't have minded the routine that followed her relentlessly, nipping at her ankles impatiently.

She would've made breakfast without complaint, without any emotion at all, going through the motions mindlessly. Eggs, bacon, toast. *As eggs begin to set, gently pull the eggs across the pan with an inverted turner.* The recipes she learned from her grandmother and the ones she learned from cookbooks melded together until she didn't know which kinds of cake her mother used to make on her birthday, until she didn't know which way of making the eggs was the way her father had them every morning.

The dinner plate is positioned in the center of the place setting and everything else is placed around it. The way she'd learned to keep a home, a mixture of her high school Home Economics class and her mother's nagging, went largely unnoticed by everyone else in the house. *The flatware is arranged around the plate in the order in which it will be used.* They didn't care which way the toilet paper roll went, which fork was for salad and which was for dessert. They didn't notice whether dinner was from a cookbook or not.

On any other day, Karen Wheeler wouldn't have let these crushing realizations to weigh on her mind. Though her doubts were always with her, usually domestic chores were enough to keep her preoccupied.

Not today.

Today, her mind was far away as she made breakfast. The radio crooned softly in the kitchen, a new song with an erratic beat that the kids insisted on letting take precedence over the whole morning, effectively eliminating conversation. As if anyone would try to break the silence, filled with music or not, there was never much light chatter between the family unit, especially this early in the morning.

She barely saw the faces of her children as she set their plates of food down in front of them, barely acknowledged their mumbled thank-you's as they hurried to shovel down the food. Was it good? Did it matter? Ted preferred coffee and a paper over his family, his eyes skimming over and over again over one paragraph.

They were both trying to block out the home they'd made, but Karen was the one lost in it. The only sounds in the room were the crinkling of the paper, sounds of forks clinking against plates, and the occasional shrieks of the youngest Wheeler. Karen dutifully kept an eye on Holly, intervening occasionally to prevent her from making a mess of herself and breakfast.

If Karen Wheeler could choose, she'd still be in bed. Her hair would lay flat against the pillow, her appearance for once natural instead of well manicured. She would stare at the expansive ceiling of the master bedroom and listen to the family she was supposed to adore leave the house one by one. The silence of the house would overcome her, enveloping her like a thick winter blanket, and erase all the responsibilities she'd heaped on herself over the years.

Instead, Karen did what she normally did every day.

She dropped the kids off at school, telling them to have a good day, that she loved them so much. Her mediocre performance wasn't noticed, and the kids quickly replied with their own lines before hopping out of the car to join their friends at school. Karen felt a

horrible lurch of jealous in the pit of her stomach as she drove away, wishing desperately she could go back to the misery of high school. Things back then seemed simpler despite how anxious she'd been to be free of that place. Now, Karen Wheeler wanted nothing more than to go back, do it all over. Do it right this time.

Once back home, she continued down the list of household chores, each just as monotonous as the last. She'd gotten exceptionally good at breezing through her responsibilities, and by noon she was glued to the couch with nothing to do but watch game shows.

The episodes slid by rapidly, blending together seamlessly, only broken up by the same commercial jingles that played everyday. It was just the sort of mindless distraction she needed. Karen wasn't focusing on who would win this Jeopardy rerun from 1978, the winners -- at this point -- lost to time. She wasn't focusing on the endless brands flashing across the screen at every commercial break, she was focusing on herself.

In the brief moment before the game shows returned and after the commercial ended, the television screen would be black, and for a moment Karen Wheeler caught a glimpse of herself and the life she created, reflecting back at her. She shuddered every time, jarred by the reality of her situation. It was impossible to run away from. It was always there.

Later, when Ted would come home it would be the same story. They'd mumble and shrug noncommittally at each other about whatever news story was on that evening. Karen would wonder if they'd ever had a conversation, if anything between them was ever real. There was reason they were together, wasn't there?

Sitting alone on the couch in their expensive house, whittling away her days through chores, Karen Wheeler desperately wanted to believe there was a reason for all of this. She had ample time to search for it, as well as ample motivation. Divorce wasn't an option in this small town, and even if it were, she doubted it would help much. Karen couldn't do this on her own, even if her husband was more of a roommate than a husband, she needed him, if only as a placeholder. She didn't think she could live with herself to divorce Ted, leaving three kids without their father.

And so, Karen Wheeler spent her aimless days looking for reasons to maintain the illusion of a family.

In the spacious kitchen, with the radio tuned to the station her mother used to listen to, she thought she could almost find a reason to stay, to love the man she was married to.

The reasons to stay were innumerable, so long as she remembered to think of them.

But laying in bed that night, watching headlights from cars passing in the street crawl across the ceiling and lying as far on her side of the bed as she could, Karen Wheeler couldn't think of a single one.